

5. Ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaī & Ibn Qanbar Sibawayh

Ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaī.

Introduction:

Abū Saʿīd Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaī (740–828 AD) was a famous Arab scholar of language, literature, zoology, and poetry. He was one of the leading figures of the Abbasid period and contributed greatly to Arabic grammar and natural sciences.

Full name, parent name:

His full name was Abū Saʿīd Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaī. His father was Qurayb, and he came from a well-known Arab family in Basra. His main work was in language, poetry, zoology, and Bedouin culture, not in fiqh (law) or theology. He lived in the Abbasid Golden Age, when the four Sunni sect (maslak) (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, Hanbali) were just forming, because of that, historians don't classify him clearly as Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, or Hanbali.

Early life & background:

He was born around 740 AD in Basra, Iraq, during the early Abbasid period. From a young age, he showed great interest in the Arabic language, Bedouin culture, and poetry.

In which caliphate:

He lived during the Abbasid Caliphate, which was a golden age of science, literature, and culture.

His teacher; education & influences:

He studied under great scholars like al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (the founder of Arabic prosody and lexicography). He was also influenced by Bedouin Arabs, from whom he learned pure Arabic expressions and poetry (studied under Abū Amr ibn al-Alā and other masters of Arabic poetry and grammar).

Career & historical context:

Al-Aṣmaī became a teacher, poet, and court scholar in Baghdad. He served the Abbasid caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Mamūn, entertaining them with stories, poems, and scientific observations. He is remembered as part of the intellectual flowering of the Abbasid era.

Major work/books:

Al-Aṣmaī wrote many books that connected Arabic language, literature, and natural science. His book:

1. Kitāb al-Khayl (Book of Horses) describes the breeds, behavior, and importance of horses in Arab culture and war.
2. Kitāb al-Ibil (Book of Camels) explains the uses of camels in travel, trade, and daily life, as well as their physical features.
3. Kitāb al-Wuḥūsh (Book of Wild Animals) is one of the earliest works on zoology, giving detailed descriptions of different animals, their habits, and their habitats.

Along with these, he also wrote works on Arabic grammar, poetry, and Bedouin expressions, which helped preserve the richness of pure Arabic. His books show his skill in combining science with literature, making him one of the most important scholars of the Abbasid era.

Contribution in modern science:

His works on animals and nature are considered early contributions to zoology. He carefully described the behavior, anatomy, and use of horses, camels, and other animals, providing valuable information for later scientists.

Technic & thoughts:

Al-Aṣmaʿī's method was based on careful observation, collection of Bedouin poetry, and accurate recording of language. He valued the purity of Bedouin Arabic and used it as the standard for grammar and poetry.

Death & legacy:

He died in 828 AD in Basra. His works influenced later Arabic linguists, poets, and scientists. He left behind a legacy of combining literature with natural science.

Critical/critics perspectives:

Some critics argued that he was too focused on Bedouin language and traditions, but others praised him for preserving the richness of Arabic and linking it with science.

Conclusion:

Abū Saʿīd al-Aṣmaʿī was a remarkable scholar who united Arabic literature, poetry, and zoology. His writings helped preserve the Arabic language and inspired scientific curiosity in the Abbasid golden age.

Amr ibn Uthmān ibn Qanbar nickname Sībawayh

Introduction:

Amr ibn Uthmān ibn Qanbar, better known by his nickname Sībawayh (760–796 AD), was one of the greatest scholars of the Arabic language. He is regarded as the 'father of Arabic grammar' because of his ground-breaking work on the rules and structure of Arabic.

Full name, parent name:

His full name was Amr ibn Uthmān ibn Qanbar. He was originally of Persian descent and earned the nickname Sībawayh, meaning 'the scent of apples' in Persian. Details about his father are limited, but he came from a modest family background. Historians generally describe him as a Sunni Muslim, since he studied under al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, who was a respected early Sunni scholar. He is not claimed by Shia (Jafari or Ismaili) traditions, and there is no record of him being linked to them. And it is not clear that he was from which Sunni sect (maslak) as the sect (maslak) were not fully formed in during period.

Early life & background:

Sībawayh was born around 760 AD in the town of Bayda in present-day Iran. He grew up in a non-Arab environment but developed a deep love for the Arabic

language. His early life was marked by study and dedication to mastering Arabic, which was the language of religion and scholarship.

In which caliphate:

He lived during the Abbasid Caliphate, a golden age for scholarship, culture, and linguistic studies.

His teacher; education & influences:

He studied under leading scholars of his time, especially al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, who shaped his understanding of grammar, lexicography, and linguistics. He also learned from Yunus ibn Habib and other scholars in Basra.

Career & historical context:

Sībawayh moved to Basra, which was a center of Arabic scholarship. He devoted his career to teaching and writing about grammar. He was part of the Basran school of grammar, which debated with the Kufan school. His work helped standardize Arabic grammar during the Abbasid period when Arabic was the language of administration and science.

Major work/books:

His most famous and only known book is 'al-Kitāb' (The Book). This monumental work is the first comprehensive book on Arabic grammar. It covers phonetics, syntax, morphology, and linguistic theory. Scholars have studied it for centuries, and it became the foundation of Arabic grammar studies.

Contribution in modern science:

Though not science in the modern sense, Sībawayh's work influenced modern linguistics. His detailed analysis of language structure laid the foundation for Arabic linguistics and even inspired comparative studies in other languages.

Technic & thoughts:

Sībawayh's technique was based on logical analysis, careful listening to native speakers (especially Bedouins), and systematic organization of language rules. He believed in preserving the purity of Arabic while explaining its grammar scientifically.

Death & legacy:

Sībawayh died young, around 796 AD, in Shiraz, Persia. Despite his short life, his legacy is enormous. His book 'al-Kitāb' remains a cornerstone of Arabic grammar, studied by scholars for over 1,200 years.

Critical/critics perspectives:

Some critics thought Sībawayh relied too heavily on Bedouin Arabic, which did not always match urban usage. Others argued that his rules were sometimes too rigid. However, most scholars praise him as the greatest authority in Arabic grammar.

Conclusion:

Sībawayh was a brilliant linguist whose work defined the science of Arabic grammar. His book 'al-Kitāb' secured his place as the father of Arabic linguistics, and his influence continues in the study of Arabic today.